

## OBITUARIES

## Warren Sonbert

A memorial service is planned next month for Warren Sonbert, an internationally known independent film maker whose work has been exhibited in Europe and North America. Mr. Sonbert died Wednesday of AIDS complications. He was 47.

A New York City native, Mr. Sonbert began making films in 1966 while a student at New York University. He made 18 films in an abstract and avant-garde fashion that often reflected his interests in travel, opera, classical music and other performing and visual arts.

In the early 1970s, he moved to San Francisco, where he taught film making at the San Francisco Art Institute and wrote reviews of operas and films for weekly publications.

Friends remember him as having a significant influence on the San Francisco independent film community.

"He had an international reputation," said Robert Riley, curator for media arts at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. "His inclusion in these extraordinary film programs and film festivals just by extension garnered a lot of attention to San Francisco avant-garde film making."

His work won him a Special Jury Award for Experimental Film in 1987 at the San Francisco Film Festival and a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in 1991.

"His films have been shown all over the world," said Edith Kramer, a longtime friend and director of the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley. "He had a totally individual style, a great formal elegance with very subtle editing. His work is held in high regard in those circles and institutions that look at the individual film maker as an artist."

Mr. Sonbert is survived by his companion, Ascension Serrano of San Francisco; his father, Jack Sonbert of San Diego; and two brothers.

In addition to the yet-to-be scheduled memorial, the San Francisco Cinematheque is presenting a tribute to Mr. Sonbert, including

an exhibition of three of his films at 7:30 p.m. on June 22 at the Media Screening Room, Center for the Arts, Yerba Buena Gardens. Admission is \$6.

**PLAYERS CLUB** Cinematheque offers an evening of erotic entertainment with a program of films it's calling **Won't You Come Out and Play, My Sex Bitch**

SF WEEKLY

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## Reel World

## Short Fuse

As a filmmaker and a critic, **Warren Sonbert** knew exactly how movies worked on people — both emotionally and technically. And when a film wasn't proficient or adventurous enough, he didn't hesitate to walk out in the middle (or before the end of the first reel, in the case of *V.I. Warshawski*). Sonbert's own work earned plaudits around the world; he was honored with retrospectives, 10 years apart, at the prestigious Whitney and Museum of Modern Art in New York. From a broader perspective, his success also radiated glory on San Francisco's avant-garde filmmaking community. A few months ago, the Cinematheque announced a tribute to Sonbert on June 22 at Center for the Arts. Warren was supposed to attend, but he died May 31 at age 47 of complications from AIDS. We have the memory of his droll, feisty spirit and, of course, his films.

**Goddess.** If it's tough to resist a come-on like that, the payoff includes Hima B's *Straight for the Money*, about queer sex workers who strip for men, with commentary and who knows what else by familiar, um, faces Carol Queen and Annie Sprinkle. This and much more. 7:30 p.m., Center for the Arts, 701 Mission, S.F. \$3-\$6. (415) 558-8129. (Tompkins)

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## Cruel and Unusual

George Polzer plays Antonin Artaud in "The Story Lived by Artaud-Momo," a multimedia work focusing on the life and ideas of the pioneer of avant-garde theater. Co-presented by San Francisco Cinematheque and Beckett Plus One Productions.

**"THE STORY LIVED BY ARTAUD-MOMO."** 7:30 tonight, San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco, (415) 558-8129. 8 p.m. Thursday and Saturday (also June 1 and 3), Transmission Theatre (Paradise Lounge), 11th and Folsom, San Francisco, (415) 703-0741.

## Warren Sonbert RIP

Local experimental filmmaker Warren Sonbert died of an AIDS-related illness last Wednesday. He was 47. A world traveler and enthusiastic, often dauntlessly opinionated devotee of the arts, he began making films while a student at NYU in the mid-'60s. Recent titles like *Friendly Witness* and *Short Fuse* were dazzling visual spins through life: editing together widely divergent footage (with compelling sound track choices) in travelogue-cum-poetical-documentary fashion, they seemed both utterly personal and universal.

That passion was evident in Sonbert's man-about-town demeanor as well. Popping in and out of press screenings or classical music events as a reviewer (in later years for the *Bay Area Reporter* and *S.F. Sentinel*), he could always be counted on for colorful commentary — particularly when the object d'art in question fell below standards. "Now *don't* tell me you actually liked that thing," he'd offer as conversational preamble. Sharply intelligent, both generous and imperious, he cut an eccentric figure that will be missed.

Cinematheque will host a screening of three early Sonbert films — *Hall of Mirrors* (1966), *Truth Serum* (1967), and *Carriage Trade* (1968-72) — June 22, 7:30 p.m., at the S.F. Art Institute. Call (415) 558-8129 for info.



JUNE 22

# Thur

**THE WARREN REPORT** This Cinematheque bill of Bay Area avant-garde filmmaker **Warren Sonbert's** earlier works was booked long before his death late last month; now, alas, it serves as a public memorial. The rarely revived shorts *Hall of Mirrors* (1966) and *Truth Serum* (1967) are freewheeling reflections of Sonbert's hipster youth (including appearances by Warhol Factory staples Rene Richard and Gerard Malanga). *Cariage Trade* (1968-72) secured his reputation and finds his trademark style already in full flower. Shot mostly in gorgeous color, this hour-long piece careens joyously through footage shot during various worldwide travels — finding spectacle, sensation, eroticism, humor, and beauty in every locale. It's a travelogue of ever increasing, enraptured kinetic frenzy. Reception at 7:30 p.m., screening at 8 p.m., Center for the Arts, 701 Mission, S.F. \$3-\$6. (415) 558-8129. (Dennis Harvey)

JUNE ♦ JULY ♦ AUGUST 1995

# Triptych

## FILMS AND VIDEO

LECTURES FILMS PROGRAMS

A series of film programs reflecting the personal, poetic, and adventurous ways in which film artists have incorporated characteristics of the Bay Area's landscape into their creative work over the last 40 years. This series is presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Facing Eden: 100 Years of Landscape Art in the Bay Area* and in cooperation with San Francisco Cinematheque, Steve Anker, Director.

22 June/July/August 1995

JULY 12

# Wed

**GROUNDKEEPERS** There's more to Bay Area landscape on film than the overworked Golden Gate Bridge backdrops you've seen in movies like *Mrs. Doubtfire*. A four-week Cinematheque-M.H. de Young Museum series, **Facing Eden: Bay Area Landscape in Film Art**, takes a slightly more subtle approach. Tonight the second program in the series, titled "Scales of Grandeur: Human and Natural Interfaces," takes as its subject Bay Area light and weather — with a few shorts and a 35-minute film essay by David and Albert Maysle on Christo's 1970s *Running Fence* piece, a 24.5-mile-long cloth curtain displayed in the Marin Headlands. Arrive early (6:30 p.m.) and meditate on Paula Levine's *East/West #2*, a two-channel video installation with two views of a Bay Area hill over the course of 24 hours. Next week's program (Wed/19) heads for the hinterlands (of the psyche): it's called "Light Energies: Landscapes of the Mind" and features beat takes on the cityscape with James Broughton's *Four in the Afternoon*, Christopher MacLaine's *Beat*, and Phil Solomon's *Studies for Land's End*. Series runs through July 26. 7 p.m., de Young Museum, Golden Gate Park, \$6. (415) 750-3624. (Susan Gerhard)

San Francisco Bay Guardian July 13, 1995 81  
Facing Eden: 100 Years of Landscape Art in the Bay Area